

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

DRAFT GULF WAR TASK FORCE REPORT RELEASED

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON –The Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force has completed the final draft of a comprehensive report that will redefine how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) addresses the concerns of veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. Notification of the draft written report will be published in the Federal Register on April 1, 2010. The draft written report identifies seven areas where VA will improve services for this group of veterans. Among these improvements, VA will reconnect with veterans from the 1990 – 1991 Gulf War, strengthen the training of clinicians and claims processors, and reenergize its research effort.

As a first step, VA is seeking public comments on the draft written report before final publication. The public notice will be posted at www.Regulations.gov, and the draft written report will be open for comment for thirty (30) days. Comments may also be submitted via mail as described in the public notice. In addition, VA recognizes that a great number of Gulf War veterans use a computer on a daily basis to socialize their issues and concerns, so VA has also created a public discussion board on the seven recommendations at:

<http://yourgulfwarvoice.uservoice.com/>. To view the report without making recommendations, a copy is available on VA's website at http://www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/gwvi_draft_report.pdf.

VA RECOGNIZES "PRESUMPTIVE" ILLNESSES IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is taking steps to make it easier for veterans to obtain disability compensation for certain diseases associated with service in the Persian Gulf War or Afghanistan.

Following recommendations made by VA's Gulf War Veterans Illnesses Task Force, VA is publishing a proposed regulation in the Federal Register that will establish new presumptions of service connection for nine specific infectious diseases associated with military service in Southwest Asia during the Persian Gulf War, or in Afghanistan on or after September 19, 2001.

The proposed rule includes information about the long-term health effects potentially associated with the nine diseases: Brucellosis, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Coxiella burnetii* (Q fever), malaria, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, Nontyphoid Salmonella, Shigella, Visceral leishmaniasis, and West Nile virus.

Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted over the next 60 days. A final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received.

For non-presumptive conditions, a veteran is required to provide medical evidence that can be used to establish an actual connection between military service in Southwest Asia or in Afghanistan, and a specific disease. With the proposed rule, a veteran will only have to show service in Southwest Asia or Afghanistan, and a current diagnosis of one of the nine diseases. The decision was made after reviewing the 2006 report of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), titled, "Gulf War and Health Volume 5: Infectious Diseases." The 2006 report differed from the four prior reports by looking at the long-term health effects of certain diseases determined to be pertinent to Gulf War Veterans.

The 1998 Persian Gulf War Veterans Act requires the Secretary to review NAS reports that study scientific information and possible associations between illnesses and exposure to toxic agents by veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War.

Because the Persian Gulf War has not officially been declared ended, persons serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom are eligible for VA's new presumptions. It was decided to include Afghanistan veterans in these presumptions because NAS found that the nine diseases are prevalent in that country.

For more information about health problems associated with military service during operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and related VA programs go to www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/.

VA PROPOSES CHANGE TO AID VETERANS

EXPOSED TO AGENT ORANGE (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – Well over 100,000 veterans exposed to herbicides while serving in Vietnam and other areas will have an easier path to qualify for disability pay under a proposed regulation published by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that adds three new illnesses to the list of health problems found to be related to Agent Orange and other herbicide exposures. The illnesses are B cell leukemias, such as hairy cell leukemia; Parkinson's disease; and ischemic heart disease.

The regulation follows the October 2009 decision to add the three illnesses to the current list of diseases for which service connection for Vietnam veterans is presumed. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted over the next 30 days. The final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received. The decision is based on the latest evidence of an association with widely used herbicides such as Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, as determined in an independent study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

Over 80,000 veterans will have their past claims reviewed and may be eligible for retroactive payment.

Even though this is a proposed rule, VA encourages Vietnam veterans with these three diseases to submit their applications for compensation now so development of their claims can begin and so they can receive benefits from the date of their applications once the rule becomes final.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military used more than 19 million gallons of herbicides for defoliation and crop destruction in the Republic of Vietnam. Veterans who served in Vietnam anytime during the period beginning January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides.

The new rule will bring the number of illnesses presumed to be associated with herbicide exposure to 14 and significantly expand the current leukemia definition to include a much broader range of leukemias beyond chronic lymphocytic leukemia previously recognized by VA. Other illnesses previously recognized under VA's "presumption" rule as being caused by exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam War are: AL Amyloidosis; Acute and Subacute Transient Peripheral Neuropathy; Chloracne or other Acneform Disease consistent with Chloracne; Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia, (now being expanded); Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2); Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma; Porphyria Cutanea Tarda; Prostate Cancer; Respiratory Cancers (Cancer of the lung, bronchus, larynx, or trachea); and Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma, Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or Mesothelioma).

Additional information about Agent Orange and VA's services for veterans exposed to the chemical are available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840
104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office: www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-reposessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov